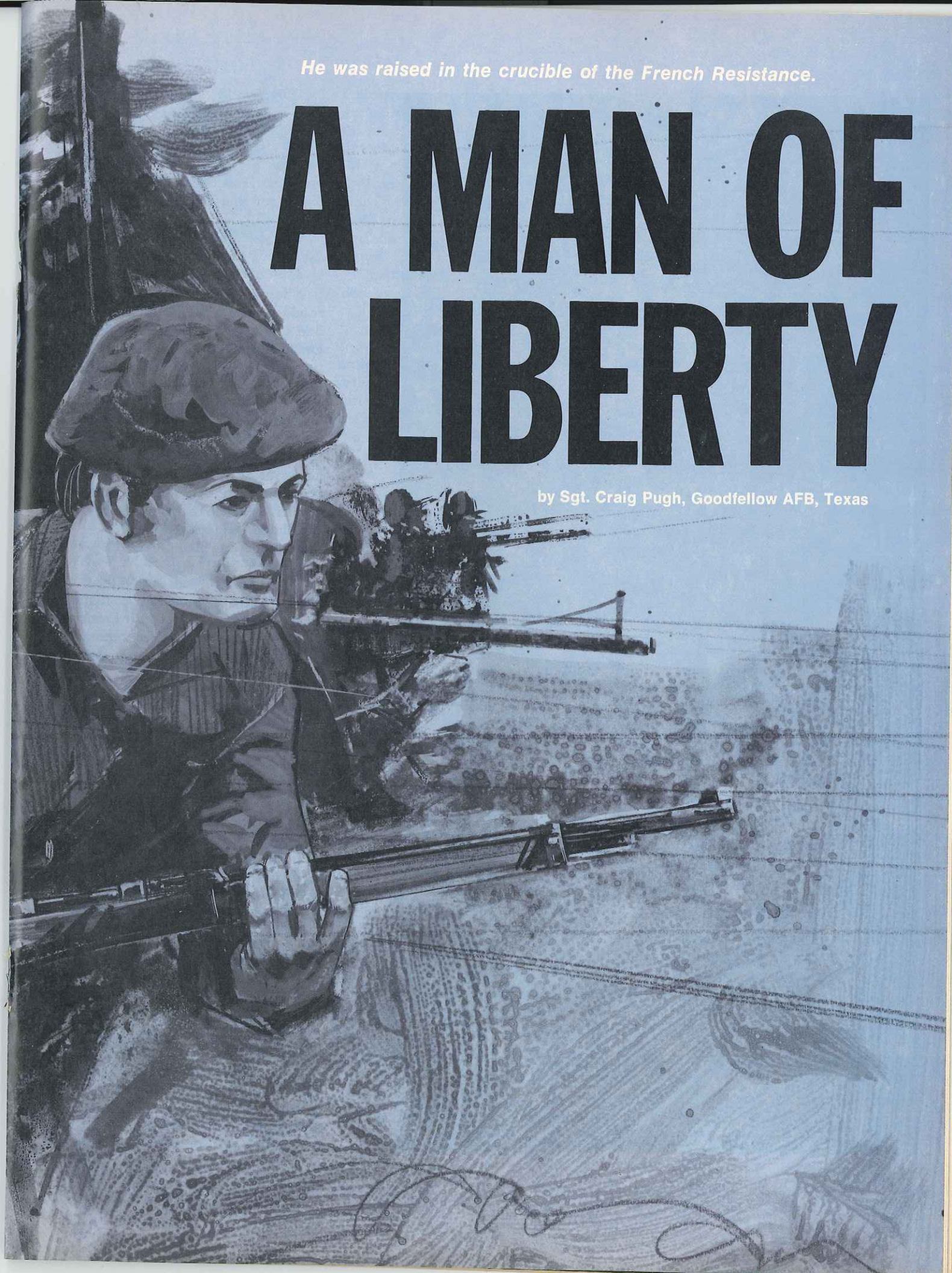
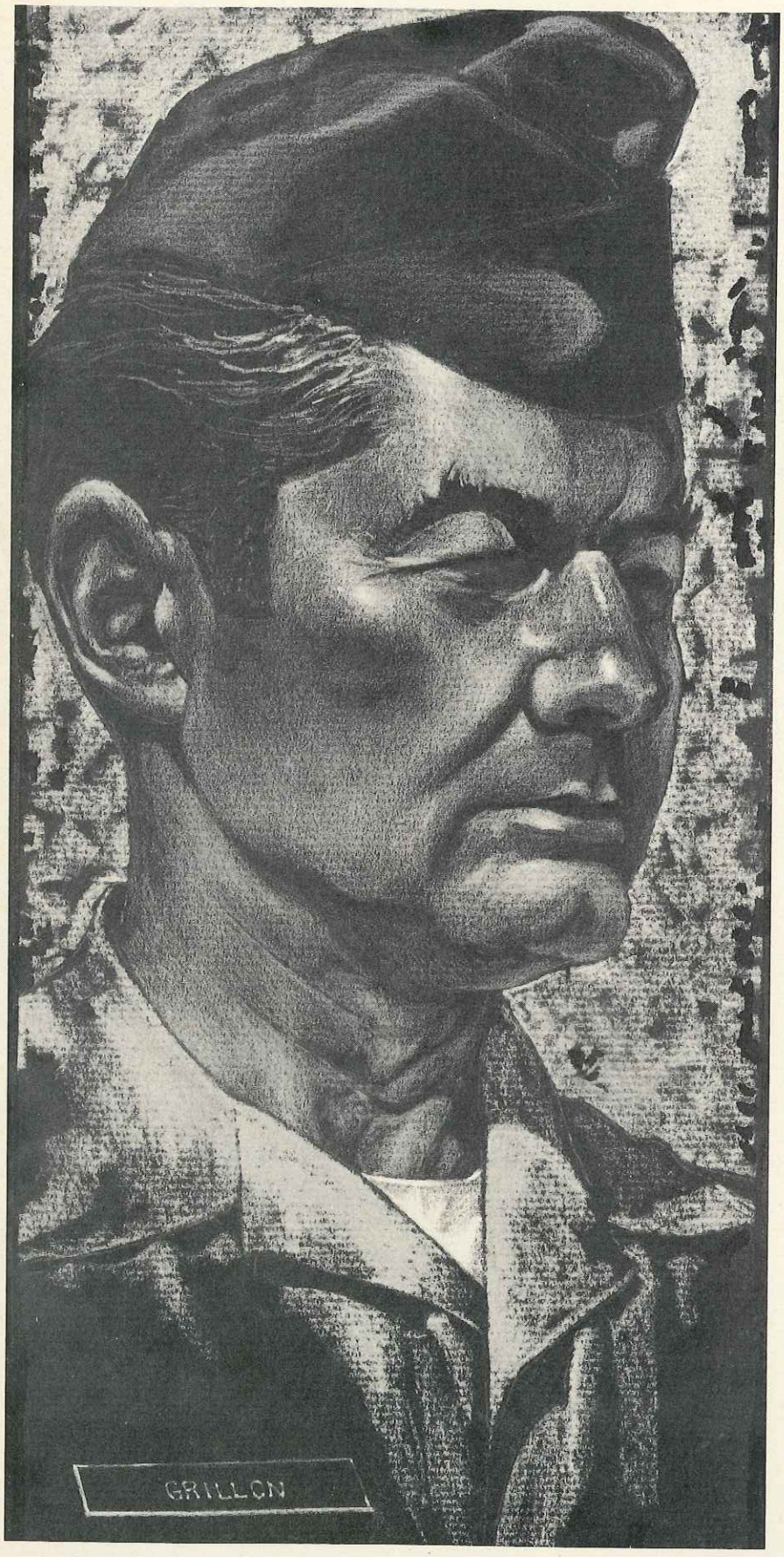
He was raised in the crucible of the French Resistance.

A MAN OF LIBERTY

by Sgt. Craig Pugh, Goodfellow AFB, Texas





When MSgt. Jacques Grillon reads about world terrorism he can still see it, feel it, almost touch it. It's closer to him than the newspaper page he holds just inches away.

Grillon was a terrorist of sorts once, with the French Resistance during World War II. Although the 54-year-old food services sergeant at Shemya AFB, Alaska, has long since been an American citizen, "you never forget your childhood, especially if you experience one like I did," he explained.

For Jacques lived under the heel of Nazi oppression, a rising flood that spilled over into France in the 1940s. And he remembers.

"I know what it's like to engage enemy invaders in combat, especially when they're in your own country; you fight harder when they're on your doorstep. You fight for your life!"

The years haven't calmed the deep churning within him. His voice is still vibrant with emotion, yet rich and mature like the famous Bordeaux wine from his native soil. It is a voice steeped in a wisdom well-earned. And when he talks of those days of survival he has a way of standing square in front of you and staring into your eyes. Confrontration, you see, has been his way ever since he fought the Germans.

Perhaps his greatest sympathy goes to people like Ngo Phi Hung, the South Vietnamese refugee who escaped Communist Vietnam last year and told a tale of the small group of Vietnamese patriots dedicated to overthrowing the North Vietnamese. "Our situation was

exactly like that," explained Jacques. "We had to wage subversive warfare ourselves, and we lacked supplies, equipment, and logistical support. The only thing that kept us going was our driving desire for freedom."

He was 16 in the summer of 1940 when the motorized German columns rumbled into Pauillac, the town in southwestern France where he grew up. France had formally surrendered to Germany on June 21, 1940, and was cruelly subjugated. To French people, living was reduced to existence.

"You feel bad, very bad to be on the losing side," Grillon said. "There is no way to explain it. I knew I would have to get free but first I had to bide my time for the right moment." He was still in high school and worked afternoons as a printer's apprentice.

The citizens of Pauillac were at the mercy of informers and collaborators, French traitors who supplied the enemy with vital information. There was also a detachment of dreaded German SS in the city.

"I remember how sharp they were," recalled Jacques, "and their insignia—silver skull and crossbones. They were really rough."

Once a train was sabotaged nearby and the SS patrol caught two eighteen-year-olds running from the woods. "They were my friends," said Jacques, "but nothing could save them. Their fathers pleaded with the SS officer in charge, but it was no good. The next day they were shot in the village square."

Town residents often awoke to cries in the middle of the night and witnessed the SS at work looting Jewish homes and shops and loading families into trucks. They would never be heard from again.

"We hated the Nazis," said Jacques. "They made war on women and children and we knew it was wrong. Soon, I would be ready to fight them. When I turned 17 I would join the Resistance."

At the time the Germans had a mandatory conscription in France, one that historians would later point out inadvertantly fanned the flames of the French Resistance. The only logical choice was to work for the enemy, or run.

Now Jacques, coming of age and not wanting to be conscripted, did what so many before him had done. He ran.

Setting out with a blanket and knapsack on his back, he traveled by night to avoid German road patrols that would shoot him on sight as a spy. His destination, the southern third of France, was militarily free because Hitler deemed it of little value. The French named the area Vichy, and it represented what remained

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of freedom in France at that time.

But first he had to get there. During the day, if he was fortunate, he found a barn or hayloft to sleep in. Often he simply fashioned a small windbreak in the woody thickets of the countryside, shivering until he fell asleep.

It was Toulon where Jacques was headed, Toulon on the warm Mediterranean where the Free French fleet lay in waiting. After a 200-mile walk, he arrived in February 1942.

His countrymen welcomed him like a brother and he spent happy months training with his fellow sailors.

The fleet stayed intact because French admirals had promised Hitler the fleet would not be used against Germany. But later fearing the Toulon enclave would aid an Allied invasion, Hitler ordered the destruction of the French fleet at Toulon. Jacques remembers that day, November 27, 1942.

"I was on my ship, the destroyer *Le Terrible*, when the alarm came. We rushed up topside and saw through the early morning fog row after row of German *Panzer* tanks squatting on the docks. Their guns were leveled at us and we listened with heavy hearts to their demands for surrender."

Capitulating to German demands, the majority of the sailors trudged ashore. By noon, three battleships, a carrier, and more than 30 destroyers—the hope of the French navy—were hulks of steel that burned for two weeks.

The dejected captives were interned in the caves outside Toulon. Guards at the entrance made escape near impossible. In the dark, damp caverns, many contracted pneumonia. Morale was at rock bottom.

But Jacques never gave up. After three months, he was finally able to persuade a night guard—an old World War I veteran—to turn his head while he made a run for freedom.

From his former navy contacts he knew where to go to find the Resistance. After a northwestward hike he met a partisan "hill-dweller" who escorted him, at bayonet point, to a campsite where 16 men eyed him suspiciously. The leaders, a French marine lieutenant who had been at Dunkirk and an ex-armored sergeant, questioned him. His credentials were impeccable. Such was the situation the 18-year-old Grillon found himself in. His friends' briefing to him was simple and precise. Kill or be killed.

"I was given my weapon and job assignment immediately," said Jacques. "I think because of my youth I got tough duty—advance man on the way in to attack and cover man on the way out. I guess they didn't expect me to live long."

In 1943 the Resistance was well-organized. Members of French President-in-Exile Charles DeGaulle's London-based staff had developed a system of airdrops and radio communications to the patriots at home.

Tens of thousands of hand grenades, rifles, machine guns, and explosives were delivered by British aircraft to these intrepid fighters at carefully selected drop zones. The supplies would also help Grillon in his first test under fire.

One night the Resistance group's radio told of a train that would be traveling in their sector the next evening. By the

following sundown, the group was set up. When the train was heard in the distance, Jacques handed out grenades and checked his machine gun one last time. Two demolition experts ran back from the tracks where their dynamite lay buried.

Down the row inside the tree line Jacques could make out his Resistance comrades—the "League of Nations," two Hungarians, a Czech, two Poles, a Britisher, and young Frenchmen like himself, all itching for combat.

When the train rounded the bend and rolled over the explosive, the blast lifted it in the air and sent the engine careening. Billowing plumes of steam rose in the night, and red-hot coals ricocheted like tracers. From the passenger cars came *Wehrmacht* soldiers, tumbling like gray rag dolls from the hillside.

Grillon raked the scrambling soldiers with his machine gun, then skipped slugs into the sides of the remaining cars. Two of his friends lobbed grenades into the train's compartments, sending fire and smoke spewing out shattered windows.

The man beside Jacques took a fist-sized piece of sharpnel in the chest and died. Jacques stood his ground and continued his fusillade. Cordite drifted in the air, stinging his nostrils.

A few days later, four members of the band went foraging for food but failed to return. The group searched for their comrades that night and found their bullet-riddled bodies alongside a country road.

A farmer told the freedom fighters that the four had been accosted by a German patrol, the result of a tip-off from a man well-known locally as a friend of the Germans.

Jacques' Resistance group would make a "hit."

Julien, the leader, feared a ruse. One of the Poles would dress in a German officer's uniform the band always carried with them. He spoke broken French and would sound like the Germans, who also spoke the language with a heavy accent. The Pole planned to go to the man's house and ask for him.

Jacques and six others slipped into town under cover of darkness, worked their way through the back yards, and found the house. They crouched low and knelt behind the hedgerow in front. The German "officer" strutted forward and knocked on the door.

"Bonjour, monsieur," he said to the man who answered.

When the man identified himself, the Polish impersonator leapt aside. Jacques scrambled to his feet and rushed up the sidewalk, firing straight ahead. The door frame shattered. There was blood. Again the Resistance was gone.

"Sometimes I ask myself if we were justified in what we did, but he was real chummy with the Germans," said Jacques. "In fact, one officer had a room upstairs in the house. We knew the man was the one responsible for our friends' deaths. What could we do? War is ugly, I always say."

Later there were grenade and machine gun attacks on convoys of trucks and troops, the use of wire to decapitate unsuspecting *Wehrmacht* motorcycle riders, and more, but the Resistance movement in 1943 was also suffering heavy setbacks.

After only three months, seven of the original 16 in Grillon's band were gone. Those who remained lived in fear of the Nazi torturers. "Although I was only 19, I already felt like an old man," said Jacques. "We lived and died like animals." He wanted something better.

Julien, the leader, said it first. His plan was to join the Free French forces in North Africa and fight with a real army. The group divided. Jacques cast his lot with Julien. So did Clemanceau, Bosque, and Chavac. They left at sundown, traveling as always in darkness. The most practical route lay westward to the Pyrenees, the mountain range that separates France from Spain. Once in Spain, a neutral country, they felt they could get to North Africa.

One afternoon, while camped in a forest, the group watched in disbelief as a B-24 *Liberator* came down low and slow and crashed in a nearby field. They saw two parachutes and dashed to the downed airmen. Two lieutenants, miraculously, were uninjured. But German soldiers, too, were rushing toward Jacques' band.

The patriots ducked in the woods, the Americans with them, and outran the enemy soldiers after an hour. One of the flyers, Stanley Plytinksi, a navigator from New Jersey, spoke some French. The other American was the copilot, Bill Force from Washington state.

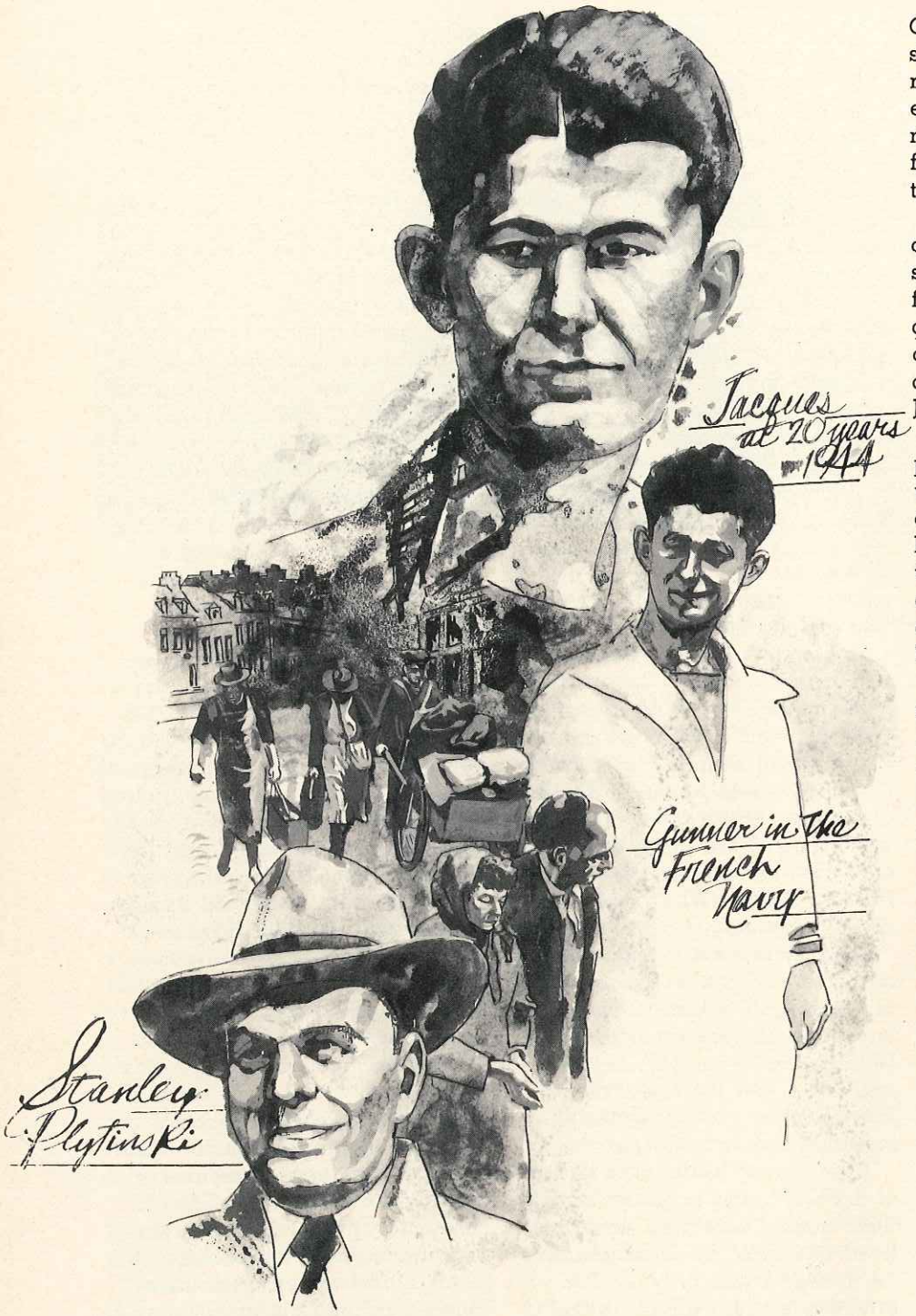
In time they reached the Pyrenees, 11,000 feet high, and with the help of a Basque sympathizer who provided supplies and equipment and led the way, they set out at night to begin the long journey to Spain. They would not only have to endure snow blindness and the storms and cold on the climb, but they would also have to dodge the German ski patrols.

Freedom, though, was on the other side.

Coming down the other side of the mountain, the guide's sixth sense saved them numerous times from the patrols. They constantly dived for cover, lying in the snow until the bobbing heads of the white-clad soldiers swished off into the distance.

They staggered from the mountain after eight days, dizzy, giddy, and weak—sick from the exertion. But they were in Spain.

Plytinski's legs were frostbitten and one was amputated immediately in the closest hospital. Jacques, racked with pneumonia and burning with fever, fainted. A Spanish family kindly nursed him back to health.



Afterwards he was interned in a prison outside Madrid.

"It was no picnic," he said, "but, nevertheless, the way I see it today I thank the Spanish government, for I learned later that all my comrades who stayed behind in France were killed in one way or another."

Jacques was detained in the camp for eight months before, he feels, he was traded for grain under an agreement in which America and Britain shipped wheat to Spain in return for international prisoners like Jacques.

It was December 1943 when Jacques, then 19, joined what was left of the Free French navy and later headed towards Salerno, Italy, on the light cruiser *Le Gloire* (The Glory). The 584-foot ship packed nine six-inch guns, roughly equivalent to 152 mm each. Blasting pockets of German resistance along the way, the fleet moved farther up the coast to Anzio.

The invasion had just begun, and *The Glory* went to work softening up German land fortifications. Jacques was waist gunner with a set of 30-mm ack-ack guns. He saw plenty of action against the waves of JU-88 *Stuka* dive bombers.

On one such attack a German pilot was able to find *The Glory* with a bomb. Amidst the explosion and chaos, Jacques kept firing away, finally catching the plane with a stream of bullets as it pulled out of its dive. The canopy shot back but too late. The *Stuka* dived into the sea.

The damaged ship, needing major repairs, limped across the Atlantic to the Philadelphia shipyards.

After *The Glory* was repaired, Jacques again went back to war aboard her, but by the time the war ended in April 1945, he was out of the service. Restless and bored, he wrote Lt. Plytinski, then an accountant in New Jersey. Yes, Plytinski would sponsor Jacques to America.

In 1951, the year after the Korean War began, Grillon, then an American citizen, was grateful enough for his new life that he joined the Air Force. "I felt it was the right thing to do," he said simply. "I must say, it's been great. Being in food services, I've always eaten well."

Jacques Grillon can smile a little at the irony when he relates his past to his present. "It could always be harder," he said. "I found that out from my youth. Now I am glad I have spent 25 years in the Air Force. And I appreciate everything that's come my way.

"I could have been pushed aside but I wasn't. America gave me a chance. I have spent my career trying to repay her."